

The Beautiful and Damned Short Guide

The Beautiful and Damned by F. Scott Fitzgerald

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

The Beautiful and Damned Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Characters/Techniques.....	3
Social Concerns/Themes.....	5
Techniques.....	7
Key Questions.....	8
Literary Precedents.....	9
Related Titles.....	10
Copyright Information.....	11



Characters/Techniques

Apart from Anthony, Gloria, and old Adam Patch, the early friend of Anthony's, Maury Noble (artfully described as very catlike in appearance and demeanor) and Richard Caramel are the principal personages in *The Beautiful and Damned*. The function of these two men is largely to act as counterpoises to Anthony. At first, both are close to him and spend much time at parties; but, soon, Richard takes up his task of writing seriously, becomes successful, and loses sight of Anthony for a long time; Maury keeps on idling for a while, but later starts to work and earns large sums of money. Meanwhile, except for a brief stint in the army, Anthony does nothing of a vocational nature.

Gloria, who has been identified as one of Fitzgerald's images of the quintessential flapper, simply loses her beauty (largely from irregular hours, drink, and lack of activity) and becomes a disappointed harridan. Of course, the marriage that was established on expectations of wealth suffers, especially when the expectation is damaged (Adam discovers the couple holding a raucous, drunken party and cuts his grandson out of his will); but, the force that holds them together, apart from the legal appeal for some of the inheritance, is simply inertia. They quarrel, but seem to have not enough energy to part.

At the end, when they have won the court case, after a long delay, they are viewed on the ocean liner, looking old, worn out, and wasted. Much uncertainty attaches to the meaning of Anthony's last words in the text: "'I showed them,' he was saying. 'It was a hard fight, but I didn't give up and I came through.'" If Anthony alludes only to the court case, then it is a hollow statement. If the author means that his life has been a meaningless struggle, then the irony is complete. After all, Anthony has been turned down coldly for a loan by Maury, has been beaten severely by a former suitor of Gloria's, Joseph Bloeckman (whom he had scorned for years), and has suffered innumerable degradations.

The techniques in this novel have attracted considerable critical attention, from the dramatic segments, set off like a script, to the interpolations of items like the dialogue between the essence of Beauty and the Voice (presumably a Heavenly one) about where Beauty was to alight next — on Gloria, as the plot reveals. The text is well organized and progresses clearly: there are three books, nine chapters, and numerous subsections titled in often witty, often sarcastic ways, which help to provide transition from plot turn to plot turn.

The point of view is essentially third person, with frequent entrance into the consciousnesses of Anthony and Gloria — the subsections frequently jump back and forth between them, but the device does not lessen the clarity of the plot. This story line is essentially linear, with clear time postings to indicate a leap from one period in the plot to the next. Thus, a careful reader can follow the nearly tragic, certainly pathetic, downfall of the protagonists easily. If character is destiny, then this novel strongly suggests that life is not something to be taken lightly, but rather to be lived earnestly.

Reviews of the novel were mixed, but the respected critics of the era (e.g., Edmund Wilson) found considerable merit in the book, and some believed it to be an advance over *This Side of Paradise* (1920).



Social Concerns/Themes

The epigraph of the novel — "The victor belongs to the spoils," which is a paraphrase of Anthony Patch's advice to a friend — sets the tone and thematic thrust of the novel. While a number of themes have been identified in this long novel, there is general agreement that it is a condemnation of American society and, to a degree, life in general. The gloomy atmosphere of the work underscores the severe, almost tragic, vision of the wasted lives of the principal characters: Anthony Patch and his wife, Gloria Gilbert Patch.

A prominent theme, about which some critics disagree, seems to be the revolt of youth against the status quo.

When the text was first published, in serial form, in *The Metropolitan Magazine*, the subtitle, which Fitzgerald probably either wrote or approved, was "A Searching Novel of the Revolt of American Youth." While some readers wonder what, exactly, it is that Anthony and Gloria, in their self-destructive behavior, are revolting against, the ambience of rebellion against the society in which they live (even as they take every advantage of it that they can) may be felt as the text offers repeated ironic comments on the way America functions — and, inasmuch as the period of the plot (roughly, from 1910 to 1920) was one of some turmoil, the resistance appears somewhat justified. Certainly, capitalism, as represented by Anthony's wealthy grandfather, Adam Patch, comes under fire, both from the rebellious grandson (who rejects the high moral stance taken by his closest relative) and from the author, who treats the lofty ambitions of Adam with some scorn.

As to the theme of the meaningless of life, debate also has developed, some readers believing that Fitzgerald did not really accept this cynical attitude (and a character, Richard Caramel, who is thought to represent the author, declares near the end of the novel that he definitely believes in "moral values"). However, there is ample evidence that the main characters either do firmly believe that there is no significance in life — Gloria at one point openly says so — or use such a claim as an excuse to live essentially useless lives (it has been noted that the "Damned" in the title indicates Fitzgerald's belief that such people are spiritually "lost").

While Anthony and Gloria at first live in "high society" and eventually, because of improvidence and laziness, are forced to leave it, some opinion holds that the novel is a condemnation of the imprudent, self-serving people who inhabit the upper levels of society.

The parties and wild extravagances of the people with whom Anthony and Gloria consort suggests such an interpretation is valid.

A pervasive thematic "mood" that informs the text has to do with the near worship of youth — almost every major character laments the thought of approaching the age of thirty; Maury Noble, a close friend (at first) of Anthony's declares that he is getting old



because that grim age is but three years away. The pathetic corollary, emphasized near the close of the book, is that youth has been wasted, thrown away.

Many scholars have pointed out Fitzgerald's fixation on time and its rapid passage; this novel supports that concept. While it is difficult to determine whether the author sympathizes with his main characters or views them as objects of derision, surely the point that time not utilized profitably (as with an author, writing worthy material) is tragically wasted. At one point, Fitzgerald titles a subsection dealing with Anthony's idleness "Nor Does He Spin," suggesting the negative opinion of the author toward his "hero" and intensifying the tone of disaster that many have found in the book.

To all these themes might be added the more specific one of the evil of inherited wealth ... and the expectation. Anthony lives the "high" life on money inherited from his mother, marries on it and on the knowledge that his rich grandfather will leave him an enormous sum at his death. This belief encourages irresponsible behavior, imprudent actions, and idleness, marked by heavy drinking, almost endless parties, and, finally, the "decay" of both Anthony and Gloria (whose life is devoted to her beauty and having a good time). Whether the book achieves the level of genuine tragedy is open to dispute, but certainly the intention was to make a point about the way life should not be lived.

Techniques

Please refer to this section in the article on *The Great Gatsby* (1925).



Key Questions

One approach to this novel would be to compare and contrast it with *This Side of Paradise*, with an eye to seeing the numerous technical differences and thematic similarities. Readers may wish to consult some of the critics who did just this, to see if there is merit in these studies.

1. Do the perhaps digressive passages, such as the "Flash-back," distract you from the forward motion of the plot? Would the book gain from their removal?
2. Fitzgerald did a considerable amount of rewriting of this novel, largely at the solicited suggestions of friends. If you had been so consulted, what further alterations would you have recommended?
3. Does Anthony's extramarital affair with Dot, while he is in the army, really contribute anything to your estimate of the man's character?
4. One criticism leveled at this book is that the author was "too close" to the characters and events, had not thought them through enough — do you believe that a greater aesthetic distance would have improved the novel?
5. One absolute digression is the passage about the Japanese butler employed by Anthony and Gloria — has the section any merit apart from its presumably amusing features?
6. Try to find as many of the often noted "cynical" passages, especially those spoken by major characters, as possible — do they reach the level of true epigrams, and is there any wisdom in them?
7. Does the section about Anthony's experience in the army suggest that, in other circumstances, he might have been a worthy person, capable of living a useful life?

Literary Precedents

Please refer to this section in the article on *The Great Gatsby*.

Related Titles

All of Fitzgerald's fiction deals with the ambitions, illusions, and disappointments of people who were molded by the American dream and the enormous prosperity generated by American entrepreneurship at the turn of the twentieth century. The novel that closely parallels the characters and their destinies is *This Side of Paradise* (1920), in which the young men and women undertake rites of passage that test their perception of reality.

Copyright Information

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Copyright ©, 1994, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing, Inc., 2100 "S" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994